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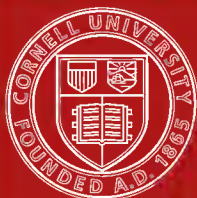
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Address at the funeral of Mr. Henry T. T



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ADDRESS

AT THE FUNERAL OF

MR. HENRY T. TUCKERMAN,

[BORN APRIL 20, 1813. DIED DEC. 17, 1871.]

AT

ALL SOULS' CHURCH, NEW YORK,

DECEMBER 21, 1871,

BY REV. H. W. BELLOWS, D. D.

NEW YORK.

G. P. PUTNAM & SONS.

1872.

ADDRESS.

It is not often that we are called to mingle with its parent dust the ashes of a purer, brighter flame than that which has just mounted to its Source. A man of letters has suddenly dropped out of the fellowship of those who live by the pen. The indefatigable scribe has written his last line, and the cunning has gone out of his restless fingers. The active brain has ceased to muse and ponder. The attentive eye, so long fixed with philosophic curiosity upon the universe of men and things, is forever shut. The record of a long literary life is ended; and the poet, critic, biographer has gone back to the Author of his being, to render up an author's account of his stewardship. Not until his faculties had reached their utmost development; not until his large opportunities had been fully improved; not until he had given, in almost every form, the evidences of his fine gifts, and added numerous instructive and pleasing works to our young literature, has he left us; and yet,

in the midst of his labors, and before he had shown one painful indication of failing powers or intermitted industry, in the ripeness and rich autumn of his years, but before decay or darkness had set in. Happy and blessed in his origin and career, he has been fortunate in the opportunity of his death. For we are not commemorating the too common history of a literary man born to poverty and social obscurity, and struggling with adverse circumstances to make a talent, which he dare not hide, shine in the averted and unrecognizing eyes of contemporaries. Born in the best class of the most cultivated city of the country, and with a modest competency in his hand, he did not turn to letters as a means of meeting urgent necessities, but only as the gratification of an inborn longing for expression, and a means of honorable fame and substantial usefulness. Had his health in early life been equal to his first desires, he would probably have made the Christian ministry his calling. But, early cut off by persistent invalidism from academic studies, he was forced to abandon what I well remember in my own days of ministerial preparation, his intimate friends seemed to think his natural vocation, and to become a wanderer in search of health during

the whole period when professional studies are in season. His moral delicacy and spirituality of feeling, his native gentleness and purity, eminently fitted him for the service of the Christian ministry; and yet we may consider it fortunate that he was diverted from it into another path; for the intellectual sobriety, elevation of tone, and love of usefulness which had inclined him to that calling accompanied him into the larger field on which he afterward entered; and he brought to general literature the moral training and strong sense of accountableness for the use of his talents which adds such a force and charm, by lending such a background of personal character, to literary work. Literature, as a profession, too often partakes of the recklessness that attends a hunted and needy life, in which the pen is whetted on vulgar wants, and the work smells of the necessities that supply its urgent motive. Superficial themes, false tastes, passing excitements, local prejudices, average morality, or doubtful and dangerous novelties of opinion, furnish its readiest topics and govern its style, and communicate a from-hand-to-mouth character to its products. It must be a cold and unfeeling heart that looks without sympathy upon even the vagrancy of genius, or the broken

lights of souls inwardly capable of sustained and dignified effort, but driven by want to sell themselves piecemeal to the vulgar demand for immediate and transitory sensations. But how happy those whose circumstances deliver them from this bondage ; who are free to do their best, and to obey their highest convictions and impulses in the world of letters ! Noblest of all, those who, feeling all the temptations of want and obscurity, all the inducements of immediate reward offered to prostitute talents, yet keep their genius sacred and pure, refusing to win one eye to its neglected shrine by flinging unhalloved perfumes into its holy oil or setting colored glasses about its white flame. We cannot claim that our departed brother had this martyr-crown of genius on his brow ; but neither had he one false gem in the modest coronet he wore. Yet, be it remembered how seldom talents, so little impulsive as his, make a systematic service of literature when not driven by urgent necessity. He, like hundreds of others of similar gifts, might have spent his life in literary ease, an idler in foreign galleries of art, a dilettante in intellectual circles, a traveller in search of new stimulants for a jaded appetite.

But, after a few years devoted to foreign travel

and the restitution of health—whose opportunities were always skillfully turned to literary account—Mr. Tuckerman deliberately set himself down to literature as the employment of his life, his appointed way of redeeming the time, and of adding to the sum of human improvement and happiness. It would be difficult to point to a finer instance, where the love of letters and the sense of duty, free from the goad of necessity, had led to a systematic and laborious literary life. Measured only by the number of his works, he has been one of the most diligent and productive of American authors. Poems, travels, biography, essay, criticism, ceaseless contributions to the daily press and the reviews and magazines, have proved the untiring activity of his mind and pen ; and nobody could charge him with easy and careless work. He always did his best, if labor and devotion could achieve it. He had no off-hand, natural fluency of lip or pen ; no passionate urgency of spirit ; no quickening of irresistible genius. With a somewhat sluggish temperament, an even and balanced nature, to which motion of any kind is not easy, only imperfect health at the best, and a general seclusion from the animating influences of either political or public life, he yet, by force of will, pure love of

letters, and activity of intellectual and moral sympathies, made as serious and persistent a business of literature as the advocate does of his law, or the merchant of his trade. His study was as regular a scene of daily labor as the studios of the artists in the same building, who painted for their lives. He went to his self-appointed task at the prescribed moment, and worked as faithfully for the allotted four or five hours a day as if he were on salary and under authority. I beg leave to adduce his example in this particular as one of the most useful and commendable I ever knew. He is an illustrious pattern of the dignity of self-imposed tasks ; of the fidelity a man of leisure paid his own sense of duty in becoming, also, a man of toil ; and, above all, of method, order, and diligence in intellectual habits. What will not four or five hours accomplish, if the best part of the day, and given with earnest, business-like persistency to study and writing, in the way of literary attainments and intellectual products? Even ordinary talents, thus assiduously cultivated, secure extraordinary results. Mr. Tuckerman, with his temperament, circumstances, and talents, might easily have sunk into a mere man of taste, and one whose life would have been tedious to him-

self and of little value to others. But with his high sense of duty and his excellent method, he made the very utmost of his natural powers ; cultivated his plot of ground in the most thorough manner ; occupied every available moment of his time with dignified and delightful studies ; and contributed incessantly to the elevation, direction, and purification of public sentiment.

This is not the time and place to speak critically of his numerous works—in verse, in studies of character, in sketches of American artists, in general criticism, or in the philosophical estimate of national tendencies. His mind, although a broad and high table-land, was too level to make his genius pointed and strikingly seen. It rose nowhere to mountain heights. There was no volcanic fire, shaping the intellectual territory, and forcing exit at one flaming vent. He was a poet ; but not one to whom verse was a necessity, and the imagination a compact and ever-pregnant and pressing faculty. He was an observer, but not one whose mind received pictures to be conveyed to others by a few decisive strokes, in all the vividness of an original vision. What he saw was always mingled with what he felt, and described rather by the reflections it aroused than as the thing it was. He was a critic—a

candid, careful, and most instructive one ; yet without any such transcendent critical faculty as made you feel that a masterly analysis had laid bare the strength and weakness of the work or the artist he essayed to measure. His works in verse, narrative, and criticism are all at about one level, and of one kind of excellence. They are all full of intelligence, of large acquaintance with literary history, of fine moral feeling, of genial sympathy, of serious thoughtfulness, of painstaking labor, of unusual breadth of observation, of artistic feeling. They seldom glow and burn : but they are always warm and cheery. They have no lightnings ; but are luminous with truth and moral beauty. And in the way of carefully-acquired and various knowledge, of widely-related ideas and illustrations, of evidences of thorough and diversified culture, of independent conscientious convictions, of absolute freedom from false charms or sensational bids for applause, they are among the most worthy of studies for young writers. But their main distinction lies in the fine and never once forsaken tone of truth and duty to which they are all set. You hear through everything Mr. Tuckerman wrote the thorough-base of fundamental principles. He is grounded in serious and solid convictions of truth

and goodness. He writes to instruct, to do justice, to help struggling merit, to fortify suffering and imperilled ideas, to plant seeds of future growth in neglected portions of the young field of our national literature or our social culture. Morality and religion fear no blow at his hands. Literature and art know he is their knight, without fear and without reproach. How much he did for the fuller and riper culture of the country, at a time when strong colors were most welcome to its young eye and vivid sensations to its crude palate, no one who has studied his influence will estimate at an inconsiderable amount. Hardly any one has been as attentive and careful an observer as he of the conditions of real progress in American art and letters and social refinements. In a quiet and modest way, he has for thirty years been watching everything that favored or hindered our national culture—fine arts, libraries, parks, charities, reviews and magazines, and the daily press. No nascent poet found swift encouragement, no young artist prompt recognition, no foreign patriot immediate sympathy, no worthy stranger a warm welcome, no neglected public servant applause, no forlorn cause a brave word, that it could not be traced to Mr. Tuckerman, as either the earliest to give it or

as among the most quiet and retired, yet efficient movers in the kindly service.

And this brings me to what is far rarer in itself, and, above all, more important to consider, at an hour like this, than any literary merits or generous sympathies. I mean the worth and beauty of his character. Of course, everything already said has implied that he was a man of high tone and settled principles. I believe that his character rested firmly upon religious faith and an habitual sense of accountability to his Maker. But he was not a man of frequent or profuse professions, and may have seemed to many rather highly moral than strictly religious. Yet, as I am slow to believe in any solid morality which is not based on religion, and think a pure Christian morality the consummate flower of faith, I will not insist upon a distinction which is really without a practical difference. But rigid morality, spotless purity of life, absolute freedom from the frequent vices of literary men, which gave a noble simplicity and unity to the effect of his character, had at the very centre of them a heart of purest and most practical sympathy, a lively pity for misfortune, an active desire to aid and alleviate sorrow, a painstaking, indefatigable zeal to render kind-

nesses and work out relief for unfortunate claimants on the mercy of the strong, the favored, and the happy. I suspect that no private, unprofessional philanthropist in this community did more acts of humane service to others than Mr. Tuckerman. He was never rich, and had probably little money to spare from his frugal but independent, self-sustained life ; but, like the apostle who said, " Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee," so he gave freely of his most precious possessions—his time, his thoughts, his pen, his sympathy, his intervention, his co-operation. If all the private letters and notes he has written, calling attention to others' wants, or sorrows, or claims, or merits, could be collected, they would fill volumes. So swift was his sympathy, so penetrating his pity, so open his ear, that he was very often the first to discern amidst silent sufferings a case for charitable effort and furtherance. I never knew a kinder heart or a hand readier to any humane service. And, as his sympathies were quick, so were they wide, and without the smallest restriction from national, political, or religious predilections. The Italian refugee, the South American patriot, the Hungarian orator, the Cretan Christian, the struggling actor, the poor

artist, the ill-paid country minister—any case, in short, of merit spurned, or labor unrecognized, or sorrow unheeded—drew forth the active and efficient sympathy of his mind and heart. He wasted no time in emotions, and stopped not at kind words. What he did not or could not do himself he could move others to do; and, if all who, during the past thirty years, in this and other places of his temporary residence, have felt his sympathy and aid, should gather about his bier, there would remain little room here for any mere general respecters of his memory or honorers of his literary reputation. Ah! how blessed is this kind of memorial! Who ever heard an unkind word of or from our beloved friend? He was a master of charity, quick to approve and applaud, slow to condemn. He was a friend of all, and I know not, I can hardly conceive, that he had an enemy. He showed no literary jealousy, and exhibited no undue sensibility either to praise or blame. Indeed, he was singularly modest and free from egotism. I can hardly recall a literary career, as long and full as his, so wholly without personal controversy, quarrel, or mistake. I remember nothing in his history to jar with the peaceful harmony of this sacred hour!

I think it must have been the unimpassioned yet ever active humanity of his heart that made the absence of any closer ties so tolerable. He wooed and married Literature, and made her his bride, and rarely seemed to feel painfully the solitude of his single life. The last time I saw him was quite accidentally, and unknown to himself, as I glanced, in passing, through the lighted window of his hotel, only the evening before he was taken ill. He had seated himself at a table in the public reading-room, apparently to write a note, and I venture to repeat what passed through my mind at the time: that, if the note could be traced, it would be found to be in the interest of some suffering fellow-creature! Strangely, and almost with a prevision of the interest his fate was about to awaken, I pondered, as I walked homeward, on his homeless life, and admired the cheerfulness and content he showed in spite of it. Perhaps his deafness had driven him to develop every independent resource of happiness, and habituated him to a solitude which, even in society, could not be wholly overcome.

Perhaps his sealed ears made him less dependent on the place he lived in, and less weary of public quarters, and helped to benumb

the aching sense of loneliness. But, truly, he was wonderfully domestic, even without any domestic life of his own, and slipped into the home circles of his friends with the most welcome and genial presence, just as I believe he has slipped suddenly into the heavenly society, a welcome and a happy guest!

He was well prepared for celestial society, for he had long been accustomed to the best company this world affords, and had counted among his familiar friends most of those who have made and adorned our national literature and art. Washington Irving, Allston, Richard H. Dana, Dr. Francis, Halleck, John P. Kennedy, and all our living poets and artists of note may be said to have been his personal intimates.

In the closing verse of one of his sweetest poems, "To Mary," he reveals a longing which so gentle and loving a nature as his could not fail to have sometimes felt, but which was never fully satisfied, if it was habitually experienced :

"What spirits round my weary way are flying,
What fortunes on my future life await,
Like the mysterious hymns the winds are sighing,
Are all unknown—in trust I bide my fate.
But if one blessing I might crave from Heaven,
'Twould be, that Mary should my being cheer,
Hang o'er me when the chord of life is riven,
Be my dear household word and my last accent here."

If his prayer was partly, it was not wholly denied ; for, wifeless and childless, he died among his kindred, the object of the warmest care and the most assiduous skill.

Instead of the fond and tender regrets of wife and children, let him have the benedictions and honest tears of countless friends ; the grateful memory of the artists and authors, whose honor he kept so generously and faithfully ; the sweet regrets of the thousands he has blessed with his personal sympathy ; and the honorable fame which his country will give to a pen that never wrote a weak, or wicked, or worthless line during a literary life of perpetual industry, extended to thirty years. Let the lovers of truth and morality bless his untarnished name and wholesome influence, and religion follow his ascended spirit, in confident hope that it is at peace with God !

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